

Agenda Item	<b>9</b>
Report No	<b>ECI/18/26</b>

## The Highland Council

**Committee:** Economy and Infrastructure

**Date:** 28 May 2026

**Report Title:** Ardersier Local Nature Reserve Declaration

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive - Place

### **1 Purpose/Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The declaration of a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) enables locally important sites for nature to be safeguarded through the active management of its habitats and through establishing a management plan to facilitate improvements to the site for local communities, visitors and biodiversity.
- 1.2 This report asks the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for approval to declare Ardersier Common, as shown within **Appendix 2**, a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The declaration of a new LNR will assist the Council in fulfilling its statutory biodiversity duty and support the Council's commitments as outlined in the Ecology Strategy.
- 1.3 The proposed LNR is comprised of land owned by public bodies (Highland Council, Scottish Water and the Secretary of State for Defence) and private individuals, as shown in **Appendix 3**. The proposal is supported by the recently formed Ardersier Common LNR Management Group, membership of which includes representatives of the Council, Community Council, landowners/managers, High Life Highland, local environmental NGOs and other interested individuals and stakeholders. The proposal has been endorsed by NatureScot. The proposed LNR demonstrates a shared, joined up, cross-sector and community-inclusive approach to supporting nature recovery
- 1.4 Delegated authority is sought by the Assistant Chief Executive – Place to conclude and thereafter declare Ardersier Common to be a Local Nature Reserve.

## 2 Recommendations

### 2.1 Members are asked to:-

- i. **Agree** that the proposed area shown in **Appendix 2** be declared the Ardersier Common Local Nature Reserve; and
- ii. **Agree to delegate authority** to the Assistant Chief Executive – Place, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee, to conclude, and thereafter declare in pursuance of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 the area to be managed as a Local Nature Reserve.

## 3 Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** - At present there are no resource implications for the Council from the proposed declaration. However, the Reserve Management Statement and subsequent LNR Management Plan, when written, will highlight key areas requiring investment. The Council's Nature Restoration Fund has been earmarked to fund the Management Plan and a range of small-scale works within the proposed LNR. It is anticipated that further grant aid will be available from NatureScot's Nature Restoration Fund in 2026/27 with the further possibility of both independent funding and corporate sponsorship of the site.

The Council's Environment Team are already responsible for the management of a significant percentage of the proposed LNR. It is expected that, in the short-term, additional officer time will be required to manage the development of the Management Plan, attend management group meetings and carry out site visits; this can be met within existing resources. Once the LNR is fully functional, Council officer input is anticipated to be minimal.

- 3.2 **Legal** - All agreements entered in to as part of the declaration (Local Nature Reserve Agreements and Local Nature Reserve Declaration) have been considered by The Highland Council legal department. The Council will not incur any additional statutory responsibilities or obligations as a consequence of the declaration of Ardersier Common as a Local Nature Reserve.

The declaration of a new LNR would assist the Council in meeting its duty to further the conservation of biodiversity in all its functions, as required by the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 further obligates the Council to support ecosystem restoration and resilience, including the enhancement of natural habitats to address climate and biodiversity crises; this proposal would further the Council's progress in these areas.

- 3.3 **Risk** - None identified. This will deliver positive and proactive management and enhancement of Highland's biodiversity and natural environment and help secure the long-term management of an area of highly valued by the local community.

- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – No implications.

- 3.5 **Gaelic** - Any informative resource developed for the LNR including on-site interpretation will be developed in line with the Council's Gaelic Language Plan 2024-2029.

## 4 Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 **Integrated Impact Assessment - Summary**
  - 4.3.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment screening was undertaken on 21 January 2026. The conclusions have been subject to the relevant Manager Review and Approval.
  - 4.3.2 The Screening process has concluded that there is no impact needed. Members are asked to consider the summary within **Appendix 1** to support the decision-making process.

## 5 Background

- 5.1 A Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is a place with special local natural interest, set up to protect nature, and for people to enjoy and appreciate. They offer a natural environment, in contrast with formal open green spaces such as parks and gardens but are still readily accessible to people. Ardersier Common, if declared a Local Nature Reserve, would be the 102<sup>nd</sup> Local Nature Reserve in Scotland, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Local Nature Reserve in Highland alongside Merkinch LNR.
- 5.2 Local Authorities have statutory powers to set up and manage LNRs under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. When establishing an LNR, the Council must consult with NatureScot who advise on the biodiversity context of the site. To make LNRs as accessible as possible, NatureScot has stated it would like to see more designated LNRs in and around towns and cities.
- 5.3 During 2025, the Ardersier community via the Ardersier and Petty Community Council approached the Highland Council's Environment Team seeking advice and assistance regarding the possibility and procedure to declare Ardersier Common an LNR.
- 5.4 An initial assessment of the site was undertaken to ensure the site could satisfy the 8 criteria for a LNR as specified in the 1949 Act as well as the two further criteria as recommended by NatureScot. It was found that the site would meet all 10 criteria as detailed within **Appendix 4**.
- 5.5 A preferred boundary was identified and relevant landowners/land managers contacted with informal discussion between the parties taking place in late 2025 and into early 2026.

- 5.6 The LNR boundary, as proposed, covers a site area of 18.9 ha and comprises land in the ownership of five parties as detailed within **Appendix 3**:-
- The Highland Council (current Ardersier Common area including picnic site, car park and the majority of the core path network);
  - Scottish Water (area of core path network and strip of land surrounding Ardersier Wastewater Treatment Works, adjoining Council land to the northwest);
  - Secretary of State for Defence (MoD) (land leading northwest from the Ardersier Wastewater Treatment Works to Fort George);
  - Private landowner (small area of wooded brushland adjoining Council land immediately to the southeast); and
  - Private landowner (small area of land between Scottish Water and the MoD)
- 5.7 The Council-owned land is managed and maintained by the Council's Environment Team. No issues or significant additional burdens are anticipated and overall the declaration of the LNR would be considered a positive step in management terms.
- 5.8 Extensive consultation has taken place with all other landowners/land managers, and all have provided written confirmation that they are content with the declaration of Ardersier Common as a LNR as per the plans shown in **Appendices 2 and 3**.
- 5.9 The Act requires that the Council provide NatureScot with a Reserve Management Statement as detailed within **Appendix 5** prior to formal consultation with NatureScot. The Reserve Management Statement sets out a brief description of the site and its aims and objectives. This includes actual and/or potential biodiversity management; opportunities to be realised for environmental education and community participation; arrangements for access and visitor management; setting out management arrangements and initial management priorities; and outline costs and funding arrangements.
- 5.10 Many of the actions in the Reserve Management Statement complement existing strategies and plans such as the Highland-wide and Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plans, the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, the Council Ecology Strategy and the Highland Nature Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2026.

## **6 Consultation**

- 6.1 The proposal was discussed with Ward Members at their Ward Business Meeting on 14 January 2026. Member support was given for the declaration and for a community consultation event to gauge public views and opinion.
- 6.2 The community consultation took place on 3 February 2026 at Ardersier Memorial Hall. It was widely publicised in local media and through notices placed throughout Ardersier. An informal drop in event ran throughout the day during which attendees could discuss the proposal with officers and examine plans. The event was well supported with at least 40 people attending throughout the day with feedback being exclusively and overwhelmingly positive.

- 6.3 A formal meeting, which included relevant landowners and land managers took place in the evening for structured questions and answers and to fully understand community views and aspirations for the area. The discussion was again positive and concluded with the formation of a LNR management group, which will be formalised and constituted should Ardersier Common be declared an LNR.
- 6.4 Consultation with NatureScot took place on 11 March 2026. NatureScot confirmed support for the proposals and issued a letter to this effect on 31 March 2026 as detailed within **Appendix 6**.

## **7 Next Steps**

- 7.1 If the Highland Council agrees to declare Ardersier Common as an LNR, then Local Nature Reserve Agreements are required to be signed by Highland Council and each landowner with titles covered by the LNR boundary. The Local Nature Reserve Declaration will be signed and publicised and a Management Plan developed in due course.
- 7.2 The Council, in conjunction with the Ardersier Common LNR Management Group, will establish monitoring and reporting mechanisms to track the progress and success of the LNR.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 14 April 2026

Author: Tim Francis, Project Officer  
Andrew Puls, Environment Team Leader

Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Integrated Impact Assessment  
Appendix 2 – Ownership Map  
Appendix 3 – Boundary Map  
Appendix 4 – Site Selection Statement  
Appendix 5 – Reserve Management Statement  
Appendix 6 – NatureScot Endorsement

# Integrated Impact Assessment Screening

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## About proposal

**What does this proposal relate to?** Declaration of a Local Nature Reserve at Ardersier Common

**Proposal name:** Ardersier Common Local Nature Reserve

**High level summary of the proposal:** To declare in pursuance of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 an area at Ardersier to be managed as a Local Nature Reserve.

**Who may be affected by the proposal?** All visitors to the LNR.

**Start date of proposal:** 28/05/2026

**End date of proposal:**

**Does this proposal result in a change or impact to one or more Council service?** No

**Does this relate to an existing proposal?** No

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## Author details

**Name:** Timothy Francis

**Job title:** Project Officer

**Email address:** Timothy.Francis@highland.gov.uk

**Service:** Place

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## Responsible officer details

**Name:** Andrew Puls

**Job title:** Environment Team Leader

**Email address:** Andrew.Puls@highland.gov.uk

**Sign off date:** 2026-01-28

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## Equalities, poverty, and human rights

### Protected characteristics

Select what impact the proposal will have on the following protected characteristics:

**Sex:** No impact

**Age:** No impact

**Disability:** No impact

**Religion or belief:** No impact

**Race:** No impact

**Sexual orientation:** No impact

**Gender reassignment:** No impact

**Pregnancy and maternity:** No impact

**Marriage and civil partnership:** No impact

**Protected characteristics impact details:** A Local Nature Reserve (LNRs) is a place with special local natural interest, set up to protect nature, and for people to enjoy and appreciate. Access to the site is free and available to all visitors. There will be no impact to any of the listed protected characteristics.

## **Poverty and socio-economic**

What impact is the proposal likely to have on the following?

**Prospects and opportunities:** Positive

**Places:** No impact

**Financial:** No impact

**Poverty and socio-economic impact details:** Access to the LNR is free with onsite interpretation providing freely accessible educational resource.

## **Human rights**

**Which of the below human rights will be affected by this proposal?**No human rights will be affected

**What impact do you consider this proposal to have on the human rights of people?**No impact

**Human rights impact details:** A Local Nature Reserve (LNRs) is a place with special local natural interest, set up to protect nature, and for ALL people to enjoy and appreciate. As such there is no impact on human rights.

## **Equalities, poverty and human rights screening assessment**

**What impact do you think there will be to equalities, poverty and human rights?**No impact

**Is a Full Impact Assessment required?**No

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## Children's rights and wellbeing

**What likely impact will the proposal have on children and young people?** Ardersier Common LNR presents substantial opportunities to the local community and schools (both local and from the Inverness and Nairn catchment areas) for formal and informal Environmental Education. As an outdoor/green classroom the LNR presents a natural outdoor learning space moving education beyond traditional walls, enhancing engagement, connecting people with nature, improving well-being, and allowing for flexible, hands-on learning across many subjects including science, geography, and art, with benefits of reduced stress and better focus.

**Which of the below children's rights will be affected by the proposal?** No children's rights will be affected

**Explain how the children's rights selected above will be affected:**

### Children's rights and wellbeing screening assessment

**What impact do you think there will be to children's rights and wellbeing?** No impact

**Is a Full Impact Assessment required?** No

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## Data protection

**Will your proposal involve processing personal data?** No

### Data protection screening assessment

**What change will there be to the way personal data is processed?** No personal data will be processed

**Is a Full Impact Assessment required?** No

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## Island and mainland rural communities

**Does your proposal impact island and mainland rural communities?** No

### Island and mainland rural communities screening assessment

**What impact do you think there will be to island and mainland rural communities?** No difference

**Is a Full Impact Assessment required?** No

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## Climate change

**Does the proposal involve activities that could impact on greenhouse gas emissions (CO<sub>2</sub>e)?** No

**Does the proposal have the potential to affect the environment, wildlife or biodiversity? Yes**

**Does the proposal have the potential to influence resilience to extreme weather or changing climate? No**

**Provide information regarding your selection above:** The LNR will conserve and if required restore and enhance the natural habitats at site helping to build on the successful biodiversity restoration previously undertaken, improving the natural environment and habitat for the benefit of wildlife and biodiversity.

## **Climate change screening assessment**

**Have you identified potential impact for any of the areas above or marked any as not known? No**

**Is a Full Impact Assessment required? No**

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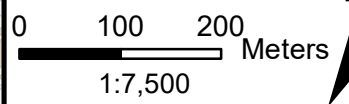
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## Ardersier Local Nature Reserve Boundary

### Legend

-  Ardersier Local Nature Reserve Boundary



Created by: DA  
Reviewed by: TF  
Date: 16/03/2026

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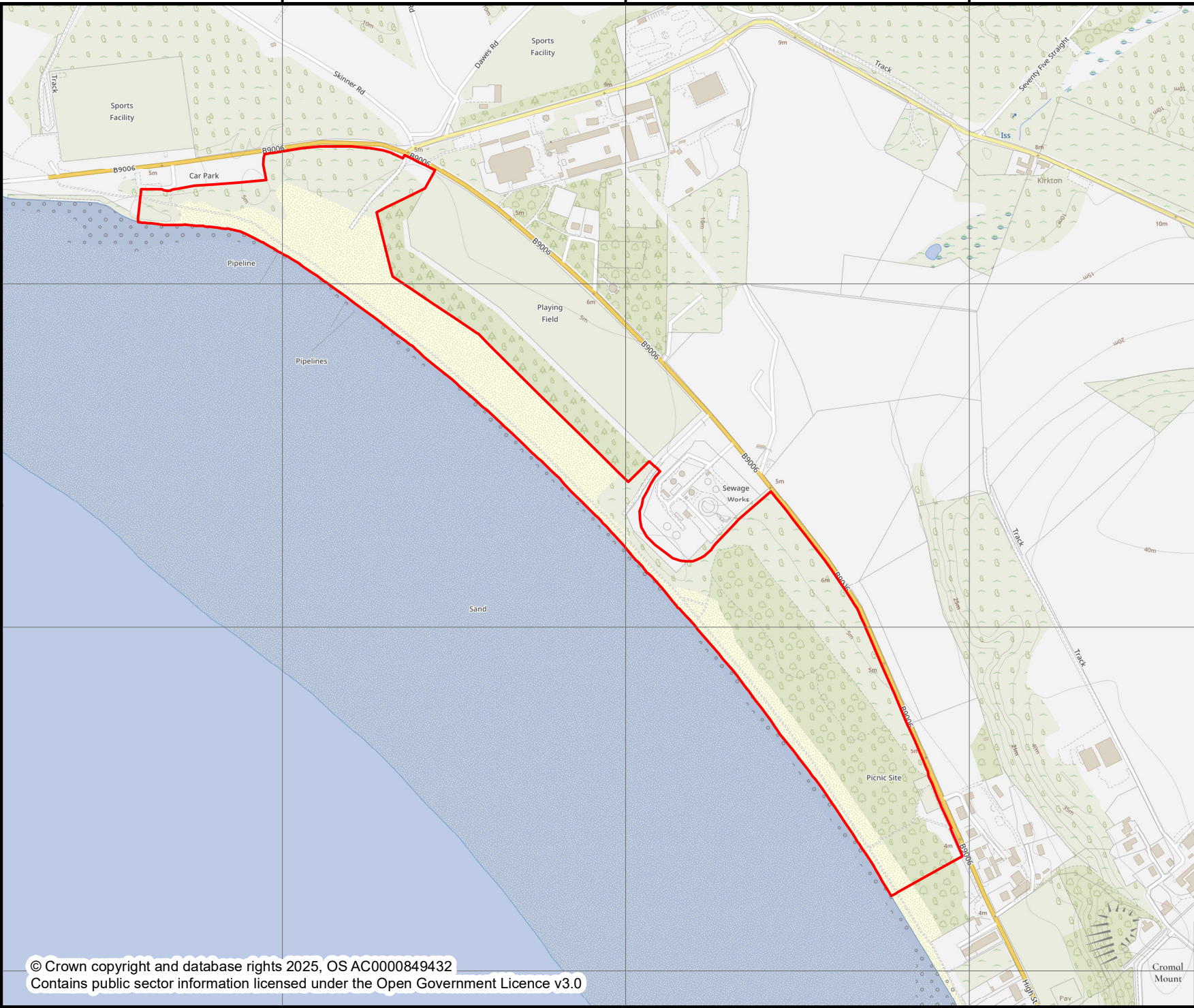
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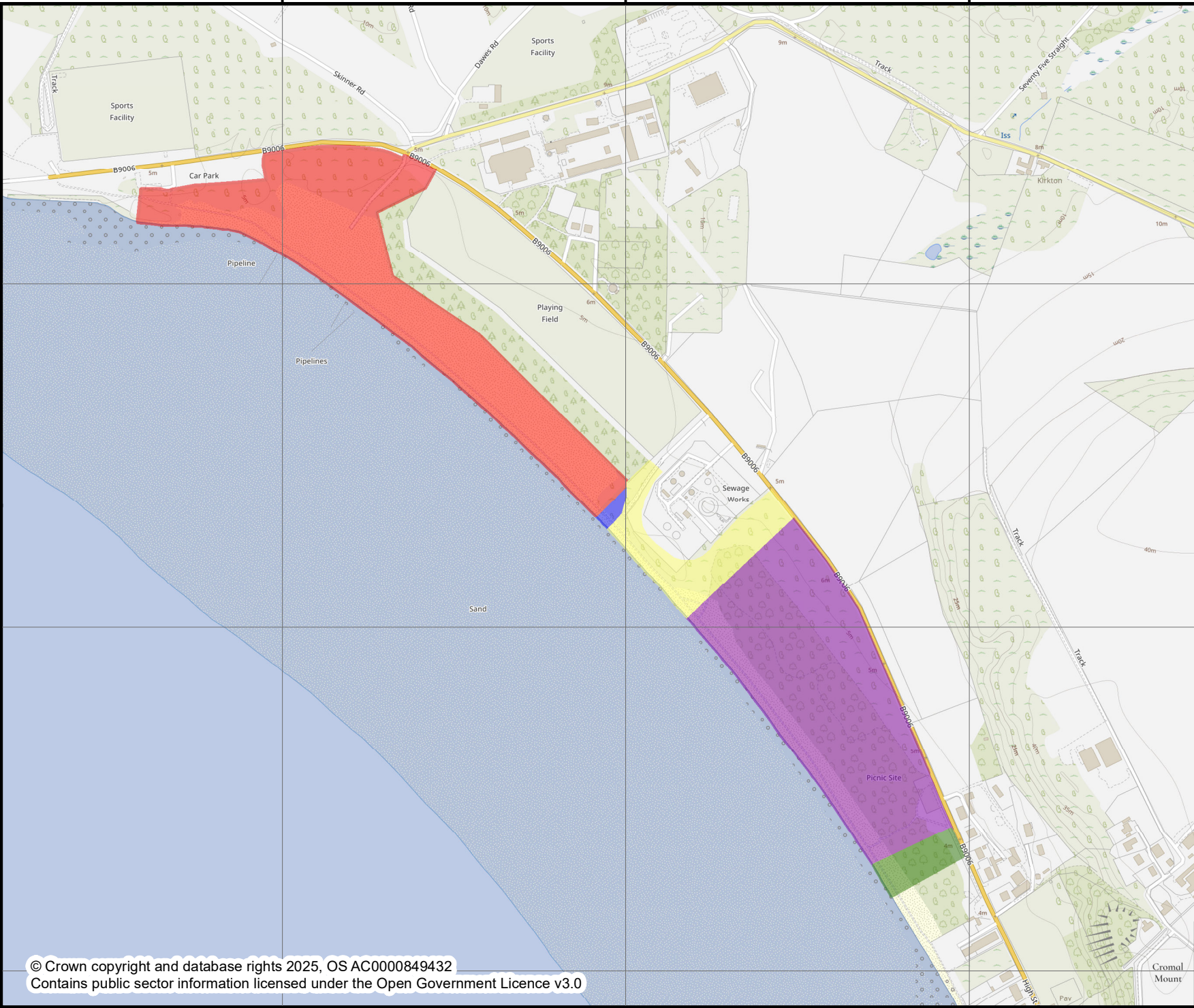
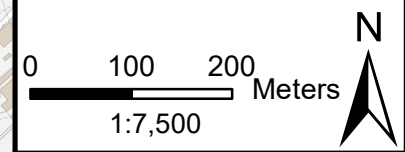


### Ardersier Local Nature Reserve Ownership

#### Legend

#### Owner

- Highland Council
- Secretary of State for Defence
- Scottish Water
- Private Landowner 1
- Private Landowner 2



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Reviewed by: AP  
Date: 15/04/2026

## Site Selection Statement for the *Proposed* Ardersier Common Local Nature Reserve (ACpLNR)

### 1 Definition of a Local Nature Reserve

1.1 A Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is a protected area of land designated by a local authority because of its local special natural interest and/or educational value.

1.2 Section 15 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 describes a nature reserve as:

*“land managed for the purpose:*

*• of providing under suitable conditions and control, special opportunities for the study of and research into matters relating to the fauna and flora of Great Britain and the physical conditions in which they live, and for the study of geological and physiographical features of special interest,*

*or*

*• of preserving flora, fauna or geological or physiographical features of special interest in the area,*

*• or for both purposes.”*

1.3 Section 21 of the Act gives local authorities the power to establish nature reserves:

*“The council of a county or county borough shall have power to provide, or secure the provision of, nature reserves on any land in their area ... as to which it appears to the council expedient that it should be managed as a nature reserve.”*

### 2 Fulfilment of Legislative Requirements

2.1 In order to meet the legislative requirements of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, it is essential that the proposed LNR meet the requirements set out in 2.2 to 2.8.

2.2 Consist of land (generally interpreted to include the foreshore above low water mark of ordinary spring tides or inland waters).

- The ACpLNR consists of land and foreshore down to the high water (spring) mark.

2.3 Is managed.

- The whole area encompassed within the ACpLNR boundary is considered greenspace with 50% (including the path network) actively managed by the Highland Council.

2.4 Provide special opportunities for study and research of the flora and fauna of Great Britain and the conditions in which they live, and for study of earth sciences of special

interest in the area; and/or preserve the special natural or earth science interest in the area; or for both of those purposes.

- ACpLNR provides significant opportunities for formal and informal study and research of a range of native flora and fauna, some of which is rare and/or endangered, in area that is easily accessible. See - Additional justification to support the Site Selection Criteria below

## 2.5 Consist predominantly of flora or fauna of Great Britain

- ACpLNR consists of an underlayer of gravel ridges formed from glacial/alluvial deposits and longshore drift action. To the south, pioneer species like birch and willow have gradually established over the years to the point where there is now a rich mixture of habitats. Woodland containing alder, willow, aspen and birch covers around two-thirds of the area.

ACpLNR is used by many nesting bird species including linnet, goldfinch, willow warbler, blackcap, chiff-chaff, bullfinch and treecreeper. Roe deer and badgers are seen regularly.

It is the diverse range of habitat that allows the ACpLNR to host a range of unique wildlife, including the rare coralroot orchid and the UK priority species Small Blue and Dingy Skipper butterflies.

## 2.6 Have the study and research into, or preservation of, nature or the earth sciences as a priority objective and not as an incidental land management consideration;

- The rich assemblage of plants, animals and invertebrates has been studied and recorded at Ardersier Common for many years, and the site is proactively managed to preserve and enhance biodiversity. A primary purpose of ACpLNR will be as a natural resource for the enjoyment and education of the local community and visitors to the area. The preservation and enhancement of the site's biodiversity will continue to be a key land management consideration.

## 2.7 Lie within the jurisdiction of the local authority concerned (or local authorities, where an LNR is declared by more than one authority acting jointly);

- The ACpLNR aspirational boundary covers a site area of 18.9 ha and comprises land in the ownership of five parties (see Map)
  - The Highland Council (THC) (current Ardersier Common area including picnic site and path network).
  - John Ross (small area of wooded brushland immediately to the southeast of THC).
  - Scottish Water (SW) (strip of land surrounding Ardersier Wastewater Treatment Works, immediately northwest of THC).
  - Ian R Smith (small pocket of land between SW & MoD).
  - Secretary of State for Defence (MoD) (the land leading northwest from Scottish Water to Fort George).

The SW WWTW and inner bund embankments are excluded from the ACpLNR boundary. Whilst all landowners have provided agreement and support in principle, formal agreements will be sought from John Ross, Scottish Water, Ian Smith and the Secretary of State for Defence regarding the designation of the

ACpLNR. If this is not forthcoming then that area would be excluded from the ACpLNR.

2.8 Be the subject of consultation with NatureScot.

- NatureScot have been consulted and are aware of the proposal. NatureScot will continue to be consulted throughout the designation process.

### **3 Recommended Additional Selection Criteria**

3.1 In addition to the legislative requirements set out above, NatureScot has two broad policy objectives for LNRs. It is recommended that LNRs should:

- (i) Increase awareness of, understanding of, and personal commitment to the natural heritage and;
- (ii) Enable protection and enhancement of the natural heritage in special locally important places.

3.2 NatureScot therefore recommends that sites should be selected which:

*Provide accessible, positive, current (or potential) informal opportunities for raising people's awareness, understanding and enjoyment of, and involvement with, their local natural heritage.*

And

*Be (or have the potential to be) of special natural heritage interest in the area, through good management and safeguarding of the site.*

3.3 ACpLNR already delivers on both counts in that the site includes a designated Core Path, much of which is maintained for all-abilities access and active involvement of the local Countryside Ranger service in facilitating community involvement with the site. The presence of rare and UK priority species make the site of special interest for both flora and fauna, and the site is proactively managed to improve the habitat for these species. There is, however, potential to significantly extend access and positive management into the wider area.

### **4 Additional Justification to Support Site Selection Criteria**

4.1 ACpLNR is an area well used and enjoyed by the community, with great scope for formal and informal environmental education.

4.2 ACpLNR is an important area of greenspace within the Inverness catchment area, providing an easily accessible mosaic of habitats for both visitors and the local community to benefit from and contributes to Highland's nature networks.

4.3 Current Access to ACpLNR is good with a small car park providing access to a path network suitable for all abilities. There is scope to provide a second official access point and parking towards the north end of the proposed boundary which would potentially provide greater visitor capacity and an alternative access point to the ACpLNR.

- 4.4 For the size of the ACpLNR, it has a wide range of habitats with potential to further restore and enhance habitat condition across the LNR.
- 4.5 The site is notable for having key plant species including coralroot orchid (rare and Nationally Scarce), northern marsh orchid, pennywort and common wintergreen.
- 4.6 Key invertebrate species on site include the small blue (the UK's smallest butterfly and on the official conservation Red List for Great Britain) and dingy skipper (one of the rarest butterflies in Scotland) (both UK Priority Species) and presents huge potential through biodiversity enhancement to increase both the range and numbers of both.
- 4.7 There is significant potential to further involve the community in the monitoring and the biodiversity enhancement of the site, building their skills and knowledge. The geological and more recent land use history of the site also links in with local heritage projects that further move to deliver the importance of the ACpLNR.
- 4.8 Adjacent to the ACpLNR are the Moray Firth Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (designated for subtidal sandbanks and population of bottlenose dolphin) and Moray Firth Special Protection Area (SPA) (designated for a number of Annex 1 bird species and populations of migratory sea birds).
- 4.9 ACpLNR borders the SSSI, Ardersier Glacial Deposits site that encompasses a suite of glacial and marine landforms and deposits which make up the Ardersier peninsula providing scope for potential further research.
- 4.10 A large portion of ACpLNR falls within the Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie, and Fort George Special Landscape Area (SLA), as designated by Highland Council.
- 4.11 The LNR designation will raise the profile of the site to both local communities and visitors, including the many tourists who visit Fort George and are unlikely to be aware of Ardersier Common and its importance to local biodiversity.
- 4.12 To strive to preserve the integrity of the site by protecting it from development that would have an unacceptable impact on its habitats and any negative visitor impact.
- 4.13 ACpLNR directly delivers and compliments several components of the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (abbreviated to IMFLDP2)
- Section 2 - Spatial strategy - Sustainable tourism Environment Safeguarding and enhancing the natural, built, and cultural environment of the Inner Moray Firth.
  - Section 3 - General policies - Nature protection, restoration and enhancement. The Inner Moray Firth is home to some of the most biodiverse habitats and species across Scotland. The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 and emerging National Planning Framework 4 all place duties on the Council, to address biodiversity loss.
  - Section 3 - General policies - biodiversity loss through the planning system, by developing mechanisms that not only prevent biodiversity loss, but deliver biodiversity enhancement over the short, medium and long term.
  - Section 3 - General policies - Safeguarding Greenspace - Green networks provide the physical, visual and habitat connections for greenspaces and therefore ensure accessibility for both wildlife and people. Walking and cycling are at the top tier of the identified Transport hierarchy.

Date: 7 January

Author: Tim Francis

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Letter of Support from Butterfly Conservation  
Scotland.

## Appendix 1

I am writing to express my strong support for the ongoing conservation and management of Ardersier Common and its proposed designation as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR). Achieving LNR status will help safeguard this ecologically rich site for future generations and strengthen the community's engagement with nature.

Ardersier Common is a 12.5hectare site acquired by Highland Council in 1993 and is home to a vast array of locally and nationally important flora and fauna. Highlife Highland Countryside Rangers do an exceptional job of maintaining the site for Highland Council, carrying out regular guided nature walks as well as coordinating volunteer tasks to help manage the site for wildlife.

Ardersier Common consists of gravel ridges formed from glacial and alluvial deposits and longshore drift action. Over time pioneer species like birch and willow have gradually established creating a rich mosaic of habitats. Woodland containing alder, willow, aspen and birch covers around 2/3rds of the area. The rest being areas of gorse with open glades of semi-natural grassland, seasonal ponds and a wet flush area. It is this diverse range of habitat that allows the Common to host a range of unique wildlife, including the rare coralroot orchid and the Small Blue and Dingy Skipper butterflies. These butterfly species are not only vital indicators of a healthy ecosystem but also contribute to the ecological richness that makes Ardersier Common so special. Due to the presence of these species Highlife Highland Countryside Rangers have been working closely with both the public and us (Butterfly Conservation) to cut back scrub, mainly gorse, to maintain open sheltered glades for wildflowers and pollinators.

Over the last two years working together Species on the Edge, Butterfly Conservation, the Highlife Highland Rangers and the local community have come together to create two large butterfly banks and scrapes on land adjacent to the common, this will help to boost larval foodplant numbers of the UK priority species Small Blue and Dingy Skipper. Creating good quality habitat corridors for species along this stretch of coastline helps to align Ardersier Common with the Lawton Principle of bigger, better and more connected habitat for our wildlife. The local community is involved in helping to walk a butterfly transect at Ardersier Common, providing key information on the health of the local ecosystem, it has been great to see the community so engaged with the Common.

Beyond its ecological significance, Ardersier Common provides a peaceful retreat for residents and visitors alike, offering opportunities for outdoor recreation, nature observation, and environmental education. Maintaining this natural space is crucial for fostering a connection between the community and the environment, promoting wellbeing and environmental awareness.

I commend the efforts of all involved in managing and protecting Ardersier Common. I urge continued support and resources to ensure that this beautiful area remains a thriving sanctuary for wildlife and a cherished local nature resource for our community.

Thank you for your attention and commitment to preserving Ardersier Common,

Yours sincerely,  
Tracy Munro



**Tracy Munro Species on the Edge Project Officer (East Coast)**

Working hours: Mon–Thu 9am–5pm, Fri 9am–4:30pm

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Butterfly Conservation, Manor Yard, East Lulworth, Wareham, Dorset, UK. BH2  
Company limited by guarantee, registered in England (2206468). Charity regist  
(254937) and in Scotland (SC039268).

[www.butterfly-conservation.org/scotland](http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/scotland) - 

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# RESERVE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT

## ARDERSIER COMMON PROPOSED LOCAL NATURE RESERVE (ACpLNR)

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# 1. Reserve Management Statement Purpose

The purpose of this Reserve Management Statement is to act as a strategic guide during the initial stages of LNR declaration and until a reserve management plan has been produced. The Reserve Management Statement provides a step-by-step roadmap to aid success of ACpLNR through identifying manageable tasks, assigning responsibilities, setting deadlines, and identifying necessary resources, ensuring clarity, focus, accountability, and efficient use of resources to transform abstract objectives into reality.

## 2. Site Description

The ACpLNR aspirational boundary covers a site area of 18.9 ha located immediately northwest of Ardersier on the Moray coast. The ACpLNR boundary is defined by the B9006 and the shore of the Moray Firth which form the western and eastern boundaries with Fort George and Ardersier village as the Northern and Southern limits. See Appendix 1 Site map

ACpLNR consists of an under layer of gravel ridges formed from glacial/alluvial deposits and longshore drift action. To the south, pioneer species like birch and willow have gradually established over the years to the point where there is now a rich mixture of habitats. Woodland containing alder, willow, aspen and birch cover around two-thirds of this southern area.

The site is notable for having a few key plant species: coralroot orchid (rare and Nationally Scarce), northern marsh orchid, pennywort, moonwort and common wintergreen. Key invertebrate species include Small Blue and Dingy Skipper butterflies (both UK Priority Species) requiring kidney vetch and birds foot trefoil as preferred food plants respectively. Both plant types can be found in limited distribution on site.

ACpLNR is used by many nesting bird species including linnet, goldfinch, willow warbler, blackcap, chiff-chaff, bullfinch and treecreeper. The area is an important migratory rest area for birds and invertebrates. Common lizard, horse leech, Roe deer and badgers are found and seen regularly.

## 3. Site Ownership

The ACpLNR aspirational boundary comprises land in the ownership of five parties. see Appendix 2 Land Ownership Overview

-The Highland Council (THC) (current Ardersier Common area including picnic site and path network).

-John Ross (small area of wooded brushland immediately to the southeast of THC).

-Scottish Water (SW) (strip of land surrounding Ardersier Wastewater Treatment Works, immediately northwest of THC).

-Ian R Smith (small pocket of land between SW & MoD).

-Secretary of State for Defence (MoD) (the land leading northwest from Scottish Water to Fort George).

## 4. Legal and Policy Context

### 4.1 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949

Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 Section 21 gives local authorities the power to establish nature reserves:

“The council of a county or county borough shall have power to provide, or secure the provision of, nature reserves on any land in their area ... as to which it appears to the council expedient that it should be managed as a nature reserve.”

#### 4.1.1 Legislative Requirements

In order to meet the legislative requirements of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, ACpLNR meets the following requirements set out in 2.2 to 2.8 of the Act:

- Consist of land (generally interpreted to include the foreshore above low water mark of ordinary spring tides or inland waters).  
The ACpLNR consists of land and foreshore down to the high water (spring) mark.

- Is managed.  
The whole area encompassed within the ACpLNR boundary is considered greenspace with 50% (including the path network) actively managed by the Highland Council.

- Provide special opportunities for study and research of the flora and fauna of Great Britain and the conditions in which they live, and for study of earth sciences of special interest in the area; and/or preserve the special natural or earth science interest in the area; or for both of those purposes.

ACpLNR provides significant opportunities for formal and informal study and research of a range of native flora and fauna, some of which is rare and/or endangered, in an area that is easily accessible. This includes opportunities to support current ongoing scientific research. See Appendix 3 - Additional justification to support the Site Selection Criteria below

- Consist predominantly of flora or fauna of Great Britain.  
ACpLNR consists of an underlayer of gravel ridges formed from glacial/alluvial deposits and longshore drift action. To the south, pioneer species like birch and willow have gradually established over the years to the point where there is now a rich mixture of habitats. Woodland containing alder, willow, aspen and birch covers around two-thirds of the area.

ACpLNR is used by many nesting bird species including linnet, goldfinch, willow warbler, blackcap, chiff-chaff, bullfinch and treecreeper. The area is an important migratory rest area for birds and invertebrates. Common lizard, horse leech, Roe deer and badgers are found and seen regularly.

It is the diverse range of habitat that allows the ACpLNR to host a range of unique wildlife, including the rare coralroot orchid and the UK priority species Small Blue and Dingy Skipper butterflies.

- Have the study and research into, or preservation of, nature or the earth sciences as a priority objective and not as an incidental land management consideration.

The rich assemblage of plants, animals and invertebrates has been studied and recorded at Ardersier Common for many years, and the site is proactively managed to preserve and enhance biodiversity. A primary purpose of ACpLNR will be as a natural resource for the enjoyment and education of the local community and visitors to the area. The preservation and enhancement of the site's biodiversity will continue to be a key land management consideration.

- Lie within the jurisdiction of the local authority concerned (or local authorities, where an LNR is declared by more than one authority acting jointly).

The ACpLNR aspirational boundary covers a site area of 18.9 ha and comprises land in the ownership of five parties

- The Highland Council (THC) (current Ardersier Common area including picnic site and path network).
  - John Ross (small area of wooded brushland immediately to the southeast of THC).
  - Scottish Water (SW) (strip of land surrounding Ardersier Wastewater Treatment Works, immediately northwest of THC).
  - Ian R Smith (small pocket of land between SW & MoD).
  - Secretary of State for Defence (MoD) (the land leading northwest from Scottish Water to Fort George).
- 
- Be the subject of consultation with NatureScot.
- NatureScot have been consulted and are aware of the proposal. NatureScot will continue to be consulted throughout the designation process.

#### 4.1.2 Policy Objectives

In addition to the legislative requirements set out above, NatureScot has two broad policy objectives for LNRs. It is recommended that LNRs should:

- (i) Increase awareness of, understanding of, and personal commitment to the natural heritage and;
- (ii) Enable protection and enhancement of the natural heritage in special locally important places.

## 4.2 Local Development Plan

### 4.2.1 Highland-Wide Local Development Plan

The proposal of ACpLNR as a Local Nature Reserve is consistent with secs 8.2, 21.1.2, 21.2 of the Highland-Wide Local Development Plan.

### 4.2.2 Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (abbreviated to IMFLDP2)

ACpLNR directly delivers and compliments several components of the IMFLDP2

- Section 2 - Spatial strategy - Sustainable tourism Environment Safeguarding and enhancing the natural, built, and cultural environment of the Inner Moray Firth.
- Section 3 - General policies - Nature protection, restoration and enhancement. The Inner Moray Firth is home to some of the most biodiverse habitats and species across Scotland. The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 and emerging National Planning Framework 4 all place duties on the Council, to address biodiversity loss.

- Section 3 - General policies - biodiversity loss through the planning system, by developing mechanisms that not only prevent biodiversity loss, but deliver biodiversity enhancement over the short, medium and long term.
- Section 3 - General policies - Safeguarding Greenspace - Green networks provide the physical, visual and habitat connections for greenspaces and therefore ensure accessibility for both wildlife and people. Walking and cycling are at the top tier of the identified Transport hierarchy.

## 5. Site History

Ardersier boasts a rich history as an ancient ecclesiastical and strategic site, once owned by Knights Templar and Bishops, and there's even evidence of Vikings being present from an artifact found here. The village evolved from scattered hamlets into a village thanks to the construction of Fort George in the 18th century, with key features including historic fishing communities, clan feuds (Mackintoshes vs. Cawdor), and a significant ferry crossing. The Cromal Mount, immediately east of the site, is a scheduled monument. It is the remains of a late medieval – 13th or 14th Century - fortified earthen motte which would have provided commanding views across the area.

The 'Green Road' that still forms part of the path network leading through the common is thought to be part of the military road built in the mid 18th century connecting Fort George to Granton-on-Spey and beyond. More recently the 'common' area has witnessed practices for the D-day landings and shingle was extracted for use in the construction of the runways at near Dalcross (Inverness) Airport.

High Life Highland Rangers have been working with the public for over 20 years cutting back gorse to maintain glades for wildflowers and associated invertebrates and propagating and planting kidney vetch (the only food plant for small blue butterfly larvae). Recently, working with Butterfly Conservation Scotland, 2 large butterfly banks have been created on Scottish Water land adjacent to the Highland Council owned area of Ardersier Common and seeded with kidney vetch and a coastal wildflower.

## 6. ACpLNR Vision

To establish a Local Nature Reserve with access for all visitors that caters for all abilities enabling an immersive educational experience. To include ongoing scientific research and biological recording, whilst promoting the health and wellbeing benefits that the Scottish Outdoor Environment provides. To enhance facilities for local community and other stakeholders.

Through establishing closer bonds and relationships with all stakeholders to further reverse biodiversity loss to maximise the species map mosaic at the reserve; demonstrating to all visitors the importance of understanding the mechanism of the natural world.

## 7. ACpLNR Aims

To conserve, protect and if required restore and enhance the natural habitats at site helping to build on the successful biodiversity restoration previously undertaken

To maximise the biodiversity value of the managed habitat on site and enable scientific research

To improve and upgrade the access provision at site

To maximise the opportunities for community involvement in the management of the reserve

To maximise the learning opportunities at site afforded by the reserve for both visitors and the local community to benefit from

To highlight the value of the reserve to the local community and to residents of Highland living outside of Ardersier together with visitors to Highland benefiting from and contributing to Highland's nature networks.

To maximise innovation of facilities in order to preserve and enhance biodiversity and visitor experience.

## 8. Opportunities for Environmental Education and Community Participation

The diversity of habitats on site coupled with good access facilitated by a small car park and established path network at the ACpLNR presents substantial opportunities to the local community and schools (both local and from the Inverness and Nairn catchment areas) for formal and informal Environmental Education. Informal day visitors and visitors to the nearby HES site of Fort George will also benefit through direct access via the core paths and onsite educational tools.

Part of the Management Plan will be to undertake a Habitat Survey to classify, map, and evaluate the quality of habitat on site. This will involve flora and fauna recording, habitat mapping, condition assessment and classification systems. Findings and outcomes from the Habitat Survey will contribute to the Management Plan and enable focus, direction and planning. Community participation in the Habitat Survey will provide a greater local appreciation and environmental understanding for both the environmental habitat of the site and management practices that ACpLNR requires.

The local community in conjunction with Butterfly Conservation and the Highlife Highland Rangers will continue to be involved in helping to walk a butterfly transect at Ardersier Common, providing key information on the health of the local ecosystem. This will form part of the planned annual species surveys that will be undertaken on a collaborative Citizen Science basis and directly contributing towards the ongoing monitoring and management of ACpLNR. The transect data feeds directly into the United Kingdom Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UKMBS) which is one of the longest running insect monitoring schemes in the world, thus allowing data from Ardersier Common to help shape conservation action at a national level.

As an outdoor learning space ACpLNR presents a natural outdoor learning space moving education beyond traditional walls, enhancing engagement, connecting people with nature, improving well-being, and allowing for flexible, hands-on learning across many subjects including science, geography, and art, with benefits of reduced stress and better focus.

## 9. Opening Celebration

To mark the declaration of ACpLNR and recognise the 102<sup>nd</sup> Scottish LNR and the 2<sup>nd</sup> LNR in the Highlands a Community Launch will be arranged for the Summer of 2026 where the community

and relevant stakeholders will be invited to an event within the LNR, this will aim to enhance engagement and provide opportunity for questions and generate ideas for the site going forward. Relevant stakeholders would include all educational facilities within the area and Nature groups and associations.

## 10. Arrangements for Access and Visitor Management

ACpLNR benefits from:

- an established core path linking Ardersier to Fort George providing a fine coastal walk and
- a path loop accessed from a small car park and picnic area (also part of the core path network)

There is scope to provide a second official access point and parking towards the north end of the proposed boundary which would potentially provide greater visitor capacity and an alternative access point to the ACpLNR. This would serve to deliver visitor opportunities to a greater number of people whilst managing improved access to the further end of the ACpLNR and furthering scope for education. See 15. Future Project Ideas.

Public Transport – Ardersier is served by a Stagecoach bus service which for 2026 is to be extended to Fort George. Visitors taking a train to Inverness Airport can connect to Ardersier through use of a connecting bus.

## 11. Management Arrangements

At present, High Life Highland Countryside Rangers have been responsible for maintaining the current Ardersier Common site on behalf of Highland Council, reporting back on the condition of the common and hosting regular guided walks as well as volunteer tasks to manage the habitat for wildlife. Following declaration this function will continue with the newly formed Ardersier Common LNR Management Group (ACLNRMG) working in partnership with The Highland Council to manage and monitor ACpLNR and may provide local employment opportunities.

The ACpLNR boundary significantly extends the manageable area and presents considerable scope for potential further management for preservation and enhancement of the site's biodiversity. A key objective will be the study, restoration or improvement to these areas. All landowners/partners will be actively encouraged to participate in the ACLNRMG and contribute at all levels towards the successful management of ACpLNR.

Due to the nature of environmental projects an adaptive management approach providing a flexible process for managing biodiversity will be adopted. This will enable ACLNRMG to learn from ongoing monitoring, and adjust strategies based on monitoring outcomes to improve long-term goals.

NatureScot will be consulted on a regular basis both through the declaration process and on an annual basis for the lifetime of the ACpLNR. NatureScot representation on the ACLNRMG would further provide mutual benefit for both parties.

## 12. Initial Management Priorities

Habitat Survey, Species Survey, National Vegetation Classification (NVC) Survey

Production of detailed Site Management Plan

Invasive species control - removal of non-native plant species – sitka spruce, snow berry (Symphoricarpos), montbretia (Crocasmia)

Resurfacing of car park, car entrance and path to shoreline. Repair or replacement of the all-abilities access ramp leading to shore.

Widening of core path corridors and creation of open glades

Increasing wet land/pond areas to provide an area of permanent fresh water for the benefit of aquatic species including amphibians.

Habitat creation for hoverfly species.

Upgrade to path surfaces to consider access for all abilities

Review and update of all onsite visitor way marking, informative displays, including bench installation.

## 13. Current Grant Applications/Initial Costs

Scottish Government Nature Restoration Fund (NRF)

The Highland Council via the Scottish Government Nature Restoration Fund has committed £20000 to cover the initial phase of the LNR declaration.

This initial funding will cover professional and legal costs including title checks, suitability and preparation of all legal agreements and documents, community consultation events, Opening Celebration event and some of the initial management priorities including habitat survey and completion of the Site Management Plan.

### 13.1 Estimated Costs for Initial Priorities

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Resurfacing of car park, car entrance and path to shoreline. Repair or replacement of the all-abilities access ramp leading to shore	£10,000.00
Habitat Survey with NVC mapping	£2000.00
Site Management Plan	£5000.00
Invasive Species Control	Mostly done through Volunteers
Widening of core path corridors and creation of open glades with additional benches	£1000 and Volunteers
Opening Celebration	£200
Legal and professional costs (THC in kind contribution)	£5000.00
Total estimated cost	£23,200.00

## 14. Future Grant Applications

### 14.1 NatureScot

Scottish Government Nature Restoration Fund (NRF)

### 14.2 Haventus Ardersier Port Community Benefit Fund

Ardersier Port Community Benefit Fund is delivered through Foundation Scotland and supports community projects benefitting those living in the areas covered by the Community Councils of: Ardersier and Petty, Cawdor and West Nairnshire, Croy and Culloden Moor and Nairn West and Suburban.

## 15. Future Project Ideas

- 15.1 Improved visitor facilities
- 15.2 New Car Park/Access Point
- 15.3 Environmental open space outdoor classroom
- 15.4 Public facilities
- 15.5 New fence round car park
- 15.6 Additional site interpretation
- 15.7 Review signposting including coastal path sections
- 15.8 Machine scrape and resurface paths in common and coastal paths
- 15.9 Raise crown around car park and thin understory for better visibility
- 15.10 New wider boardwalk
- 15.11 Clear walking tunnel
- 15.12 Re-site commonly over – topped lengths of coastal path
- 15.13 Resurface or just scrape shingle off the affected overtopped section of coastal path
- 15.14 New ramp to beach from car park – recycled plastic or built up
- 15.15 Repair & reinstate culverts on bus-stop path
- 15.16 Raise crown on ivy-covered ash by bus stop path
- 15.17 Re-site roadside hedge inside site and path (seaward side)
- 15.18 Continue opening up glades/removing gorse
- 15.19 Habitat creation for hoverfly
- 15.20 LNR Boundary review to include foreshore down to the low water spring mark
- 15.21 Employment of a site warden.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1 Site Map

### Appendix 2 Land Ownership Overview

### Appendix 3 Site Selection Statement



**NatureScot**

Scotland's Nature Agency  
Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

By email: [Timothy.Francis@highland.gov.uk](mailto:Timothy.Francis@highland.gov.uk)

Senior Access Ranger

Highland Council

31 March 2026

Our ref: Ardersier Common pLNR

Dear Tim,

**ARDERSIER COMMON – PROPOSED LOCAL NATURE RESERVE**

**Section 21 (6) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as amended)**

Thank you for consulting us on 10 March regarding the above and for providing copies of the proposed new LNR boundary, site selection statement and management statement.

We are happy to endorse the proposal, being aware of the value of the Ardersier Common to the local community and events that the Highland Council Countryside Rangers organise at the site.

We are content that it meets the legislative site selection criteria listed in our '*Local Nature Reserves in Scotland – A guide to their Selection and Declaration Guidance (July 2000)*' and copied below:

1. consist of land (generally interpreted to include the foreshore above low water mark of ordinary spring tides or inland waters);
2. be managed;
3. provide special opportunities for study and research of the flora and fauna of Great Britain and the conditions in which they live, and for study of earth sciences of special interest in the area; and/or preserve the special natural or earth science interest in the area; or for both of those purposes<sup>2</sup>;
4. consist predominantly of flora or fauna of Great Britain;
5. have the study and research into, or preservation of, nature or the earth sciences as a priority objective and not as an incidental land management consideration;
6. lie within the jurisdiction of the local authority concerned (or local authorities, where an LNR is declared by more than one authority acting jointly)<sup>3</sup>;
7. be owned or leased by the local authority, or be under an agreement from the owner or tenant;
8. be the subject of consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage.

We also advise that the proposal meets the following recommended selection criteria:

1. *provide accessible, positive, current (or potential) informal opportunities for raising people's awareness, understanding and enjoyment of, and involvement with, their local natural heritage.*

Achantoul, Aviemore PH22 1QD  
Achadh an t-Sabhail, An Aghaidh Mhòr PH22 1QD

01463 725219 [nature.scot](http://nature.scot)

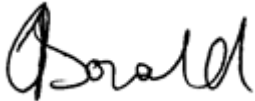
NatureScot is the operating name of Scottish Natural Heritage

We can confirm that the requirement to consult us has been met.

The advice in this letter is provided by NatureScot, the operating name of Scottish Natural Heritage.

Please contact Lynne Clark [lynne.clark@nature.scot](mailto:lynne.clark@nature.scot) in the first instance if you have any queries regarding the above.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

Chris Donald  
Head of Operations – Central Highland  
NatureScot